

# News Release

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## **Service Proposes to Protect 15 Species under the Endangered Species Act**

*Agency Seeks Information from the Public, Scientific Community before Making Final Decision*

Current evidence suggests that 15 species on the island of Hawaii are in danger of becoming extinct in the foreseeable future, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. As a result, the Service has proposed to protect the species under the Endangered Species Act, and is seeking new information from the public and the scientific community that will assist the agency in making a final determination.

Comments and information will be accepted until December 17, 2012.

The 15 species proposed for listing (13 plants, a picture-wing fly and an anchialine pool shrimp) are found in 10 ecosystem types on the island of Hawai'i: anchialine pool, coastal, lowland dry, lowland mesic, lowland wet, montane dry, montane mesic, montane wet, dry cliff and wet cliff.

The Service first identified seven of the 15 species as candidates for ESA protection from 1996 to 1999, due to threats throughout their ranges, including habitat destruction and modification caused by invasive, nonnative plants, feral pigs, sheep and goats, and agricultural and urban development. Other threats include consumption of rare species by nonnative feral pigs, sheep and goats, and other introduced species such as rats and nonnative invertebrates. Native habitat is also threatened by the effects of climate change, which may intensify existing natural threats such as fire, hurricanes, landslides and flooding. In addition, existing regulatory mechanisms are inadequate to protect the species.

Service biologists also have identified habitat that is essential to the conservation of one of the 15 proposed plant and animal species – *Bidens micrantha* ssp. *ctenophylla* (ko'oko'olau) – and of two previously listed plant species – *Mezoneuron kavaianse* (uhiuhi) and *Isodendron pyriform* (wahine noho kula) - that do not have designated critical habitat on the island of Hawai'i. All three species co-occur in the same lowland dry ecosystem on the island of Hawai'i and share many of the same physical or biological features (e.g., elevation, annual rainfall, substrate and associated native plant genera) as well as the same threats from development, fire and nonnative ungulates and plants.

The essential areas, proposed as critical habitat, include seven units totaling approximately 18,766 acres (7,597 hectares) on the island of Hawai'i that may contain coastal, lowland dry, montane mesic or other habitat essential to the conservation of the species. The proposed critical habitat designation includes both occupied and unoccupied habitat. Approximately 55 percent of the area being proposed as critical habitat is already designated as critical habitat for 42 plants and the Blackburn's sphinx moth. Of the total acreage identified, 64 percent is located on state lands, 2 percent on federal lands, less than 1 percent on county lands, and 34 percent on private lands.

For the other 14 species proposed for listing, the Service finds that critical habitat is not determinable at this time due to the lack of analysis needed to identify those areas.

“The Hawai‘i Island listing and critical habitat designation, if finalized, will allow us to better address and manage Hawaii’s endangered species and the unique ecosystems on which these species depend,” said Loyal Mehrhoff, field supervisor for the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office.

The ESA requires the Service to identify the location of habitat essential for the conservation of the species, which the Act terms “critical habitat.” This identification helps federal agencies identify actions that may affect listed species or their habitat, and to work with the Service to avoid or minimize those impacts. Identifying this habitat also helps raise awareness of the habitat needs of imperiled species and focus the conservation efforts of other partners such as state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and individual landowners.

Although non-federal lands have initially been included in these areas, activities on these lands are not affected now, and will not necessarily be affected if the species is protected under the ESA in the future. Only if an activity is authorized, funded or carried out by a federal agency will the agency need to work with the Service to help landowners avoid, reduce or mitigate potential impacts to listed species or their identified habitat.

Today’s proposal is part of the Service’s efforts to implement a court-approved work plan that resolves a series of lawsuits concerning the agency’s ESA Listing Program. The intent of the agreement is to significantly reduce litigation-driven workloads and allow the agency to focus its resources on the species most in need of the ESA’s protections over the next five years.

The final decision to add the 15 species to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants, as well as the final identification of areas containing habitat essential to the species, will be based on the best scientific information available. In addition, the Service will utilize an economic analysis to inform and refine its identification of this habitat. Only areas that contain habitat essential to the conservation of the species, and where the benefits of this habitat outweigh potential economic impacts, will be included in the final identification.

The Service is opening a 60-day public comment period today to let the public review and comment on the proposal and provide additional information accept comments and additional information. All relevant information received from the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties will be considered and addressed in the agency’s final listing determination for the species and identification of habitat essential to its conservation.

The Service will consider comments from all interested parties received by December 17, 2012. Requests for a public hearing must be received in writing by December 3, 2012. Comments can be sent by one of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal* at <http://www.regulations.gov> . Follow the instructions for submitting comments. Docket No. FWS–R1–ES–2011–0070.
- Via U.S. mail or hand delivery to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R1–ES–2011–0070; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax

Drive, MS 2042–PDM, Arlington, VA 22203.

Copies of the proposed rule may be downloaded from the Service’s website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>. For further information contact: Loyal Mehrhoff, Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96850; telephone 808/792-9400 or fax 808/ 792-9581.

The species proposed for endangered species status are:

<b>Plants (13)</b>		
<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Location(s)</b>
<i>Bidens hillebrandiana</i> ssp. <i>hillebrandiana</i>	ko‘oko‘olau	Hawaii Island
<i>Bidens micrantha</i> ssp. <i>ctenophylla</i>	ko‘oko‘olau	Hawaii Island
<i>Cyanea marksii</i>	hāhā	Hawaii Island
<i>Cyanea tritomantha</i>	aku	Hawaii Island
<i>Cyrtandra nanawaleensis</i>	ha‘iwale	Hawaii Island
<i>Cyrtandra wagneri</i>	ha‘iwale	Hawaii Island
<i>Phyllostegia floribunda</i>	No common name	Hawaii Island
<i>Pittosporum hawaiiense</i>	hoawa	Hawaii Island
<i>Platydesma remyi</i>	No common name	Hawaii Island
<i>Pritchardia lanigera</i>	loulou	Hawaii Island
<i>Schiedea diffusa</i> ssp. <i>macraei</i>	No common name	Hawaii Island
<i>Schiedea hawaiiensis</i>	No common name	Hawaii Island
<i>Stenogyne cranwelliae</i>	No common name	Hawaii Island
<b>Animals (2)</b>		
<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Location(s)</b>
<i>Drosophila digressa</i>	picture-wing fly	Hawaii Island
<i>Vetericaris chaceorum</i>	anchialine pool shrimp	Hawaii Island

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